

LETTER TO A LADY,

*Concerning the due Improvement of her
Advantages of Celibacie, Portion,
and Maturity of Age and Judgment:
Which may serve indifferently for Men
under the same Circumstances.*

Madam,

THE Consideration of the *Circumstances*, which the Good Providence of God (which is over all his Works, and extends to the most minute Concerns of the Children of Men) hath put you in, in this World; and of the *Principles of Grace*, which he hath planted in you, hath excited in me, *first*, The Affections of Good Will to you, and Desires and Wishes, that you may wisely improve the same, and go on to Perfection; and then some Thoughts of Endeavours to assist you; and offer you my Service in faithful Admonitions and Advices in order therunto.

The *Circumstances*, which I intend, are, 1. A State of *Celibacy*, or single Life; and of Freedom from the Incumbrances and Distractions, and Avocations and Diversions of a Married State. 2. A pleasant *Review* of the Things of this

World;

World; and Freedom from the Necessities of Labour for a Livelihood: And, 3. an Age of *Maturity* and Growth, not only above the Crudities of Youth, but above the Prevalence of the Affections of Flesh and Blood, through Experience, and the Exercise of Reason, and the kind Influences and Irradiations of Grace.

And upon the Consideration of these, I must imminde you, and desire you to consider, and ruminate upon it: 1. That you are no self-subsistent Being, but a dependent Creature, in your Natural State; and besides, you are not your own, you are *bought with a Price*, and redeemed out of a State of miserable Slavery, in order to be translated into a glorious and blessed State in the Kingdom of Heaven; if you suffer not your self to be cheated, allured or frightened, out of it; but *fight the good Fight*, and strive lawfully. 2. That these Advantages are *Talents* committed to your Management and Improvement; and that you have a Lord, (this Lord who hath bought you, and redeem'd you) to whom you must give Account for the same; you must *appear before the Judgment-Seat of Christ*, and receive the things done in the Body, according to that you have done, whether it be Good or Bad, 2 Cor. 5. 10. 3. That you live, not only in a *Wicked World*, but in a more than ordinary *degenerate Age*, and *wicked Generation*, wherein not only the Manners, but the Sentiments and Notions of Men, and even such as should be Teachers, and Examples of Righteousness and Holiness, are greatly corrupted, much after the manner that they were among the *Jews*, at our Saviour's Coming in the Flesh. 4. That the *Wisdom of the World* is Foolishness with God; and therefore, if we will be wise indeed, we must not be conformed unto it, but be transformed by the Renewing of our Mind, that we may prove, and curiously discern, in those things which the blind World cannot see, what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect Will of God; that after we have escaped the gross Pollutions, we be not insnared with more subtle Tentations. 5. That our Saviour hath

hath distinguished *Two sorts of his Disciples*: one of those who build upon the Sand, who make great Profession, but do nothing; the other of those, who do whatsoever he commands: and that *the Terms of the Gospel* are such, That without forsaking all, and taking up the Cross, (whereof bearing Reproach, and Censures of the World, and even of Friends and Relations, is but the first step) there is no being his Disciple; no Purchase of the hidden Treasure, and Pearl of great Price, without selling all for it. 6. That the Goodness and Favours of God, and the Greatness of his Reward hereafter, do infinitely exceed all that we can do or suffer for Him here: nay, the very Foretastes here do far exceed all the Enjoyments of this World, and more than countervail all that we can part with or suffer here. 7. That of the Good things of this World, there is a far nobler Use to be made by the Wise, than Enjoyment of them, *viz.* by Sacrificing that to the Service and Honour of our Lord, as the Spiritual Free-will-Offerings of the Gospel. 8. That such Miscarriages and Improvidence, as shall not utterly exclude from the Kingdom of Heaven, may yet be Matter of much Ingratitude to our Lord, great Hinderances of Grace and Comfort here, and Occasions of Loss, and of Diminution of Reward hereafter.

When you have well considered and digested these Truths, till they have stirred up the Grace of God in you, that you may abound in good Spirits, good Resolution, and quick Understanding in the Fear of the Lord, it will be fit then to consider, *How these Talents and Advantages* may be best employed, and improved for the Honour and Service of your Lord, and the Advancement of your self in Holiness and Comfort here, and Happiness and Glory hereafter.

And, *first*, the State and Condition of *Celibacy*, whether of Virginity or Widow-hood, when it comes to be Voluntary, and of Choice and Preference, (to which our wise Governour, by his secret Conduct, doth often bring Souls by degrees) hath the Approbation of our Saviour, of the Holy Scriptures, and

hath always been esteemed very Honourable in the Christian Church, and believ'd to be Matter of great Reward hereafter. It is true, it is not Matter of strict Obligation to all; nor could it be; because inconsistent with the Propagation of Mankind; but very often when Souls are come to good Maturity in Spiritual things, they have such evident Calls to it, both by the special Providence, and by Motions of the Grace of God, as lay a *special Obligation* upon Them, and which They cannot break through; but they run themselves into the Briers, and into inextricable Difficulties, which makes them experiment the Accomplishment of *St. Paul's Prediction*; whereof I have known divers remarkable Examples. It is therefore both Prudence, and a noble Act of Gratitude and Devotion, upon true Principles, to embrace and follow *St. Paul's Advice and Resolution*, upon *mature Deliberation* of the Case, *1 Cor. 7. 1, 8, 25, 26, 29*: and what he so earnestly presseth elsewhere, to present our Bodies a living Sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God. It must be upon right Principles, and for a right End, which is expressed by *St. Paul*, by taking care for the things of the Lord, how you may please the Lord, *v. 32.* and *v. 35.* for that which is comely, and that you may attend upon the Lord without distraction: for otherwise, neither will it be accepted with God, who looks principally at the Heart and Intention; nor will it be like to continue with any Comfort and good Success to your self: And it must be employed to that end; by Abstraction from unnecessary Visits, unprofitable Conversation, and impertinent Employments, and Retirement for Spiritual Exercises, the Worship of God in Publick, and Works of Charity to Men.

And this brings us to the Consideration of the *Second* of those Advantages before-mentioned, your Talent of the *Portion* of the Things of this World, which you have received. The *True Use of External things* is, in my Apprehension, as little understood in this Age as ever. The Advice, which I would recommend concerning it, is this, to *exercise your self to need as little of the World as may be*: This is done by Abstinence from

from the Use of all that can well be spared, and is not very necessary. And it hath these Advantages to recommend it: 1. It is a Means to acquire a more absolute Dominion of the Soul over the Body. 2. When it is done for that Purpose, and in order to the more compleat Subjection of the whole Man to God; it is an Act of the great Business of our Lives, and a reasonable Sacrifice, acceptable to God. 3. It will come into Account for Recompence and Augmentation of Reward hereafter. 4. It will make our Lives more easie, and more easily provided for here. 5. It is an Imitation and Recommendation of the Example of our Saviour, and his Disciples of old, and a Payment of due Honour and Respect to them. 6. It is a kind of fighting the Lord's Battles, by opposing a very considerable Stratagem of the Enemy, *viz.* to distract and incumber us with Cares about Unnecessary things, by raising Emulation in Peoples Minds for them: whereas, whoever in Fact doth contribute to the Recommendation of these things, doth the Devil's Work, exposing his Wares, promoting his Policies, and encouraging and heightening that Emulation; whatever he may pretend or intend for the Service of God. 7. It doth promote us to the nearest Approaches to the Angelick State, that our Mortality can bear. 8. It is a ready way to obtain more excellent Enjoyments of Spiritual Consolations, Graces, and Fore-tastes of Heaven while we live upon Earth.

Secondly, As we must be provident that our Master's Talent be not wasted, so we must be prudent and studious that it may be well employed, and improved for our Master's Service; that if we be Rich in this World, we be proportionably Rich towards God; Rich in good Works, Rich in Treasure laid up in Heaven, where even a Cup of cold Water given to a Disciple, in the Name of a Disciple, shall be remembered and rewarded. This is a Matter so abundantly inculcated in the Gospel, and in the Exhortations and Examples of the Christians of after-Ages, declaring the Danger of Riches, and directing how to use and bestow them in order to Perfection and Happiness hereafter;

recom-

recommending Contempt of the World, and Heavenly-mindedness; and obliging all Christians, at their first Initiation by Baptism, to renounce the World, and the Poms and Vanities thereof; that the Glosses, Shifts, and Evasions, wherewith too many of our Teachers impose upon themselves, abuse others, and, as the Pharisees heretofore, make the Word of God, the Precepts of the Gospel, and the illustrious Examples, if not of our Saviour Himself, yet of his Saints, designed, no less than the Precepts, for our Instruction, not only of none effect, but even slighted, despised, contemned and reproached, as Monckery and Melancholy, or calculated only for Times of Persecution, (tho' Times of Prosperity do most need such Admonitions) that if well considered it is a sad Instance of the Degeneracy and Corruption of this Age, and does deserve good Consideration, and great Resolution, that we be not carried away with the Stream, if not to Destruction; yet to the Obstruction of our Graces, and to our Loss, and diminution of that full Reward hereafter, which is of far greater Concern to us than this World, and all that is therein. But to a Person of your Parts, and Progress in the study of Religion, and disposition to it, I hope I need not farther enlarge upon it. And for the Practice of it, I know not what can be proposed more proper than the PROPOSAL, wherof a few Copies were lately Printed, and one of them is here inclosed.

The *Third* Advantage doth greatly enhance the Obligations of the other *Two*, by setting such Persons above the Excuses of such, as have not yet arrived to that Maturity of Judgment and Command of themselves; and by qualifying Them for the good Use and Improvement of them for the Service of God, and their own Benefit and Advancement in Grace and Vertue here, and Happiness hereafter.

Against this, which hath been said, Flesh and Blood (if we consult with Them) will certainly Object, and the Spirit, which rules in the Children of Disobedience (if we will hearken to Him) will as certainly Suggest, all that can with
any

any Colour or Appearance be alleadged. But if you will adhere to Reason, if you will believe the Revelation of the Scripture, if you will attend to our Saviour's Admonitions and Example, and if you will gratefully imbrace and faithfully follow the Conduct of the good Spirit; the first will satisfie you that Future things of great Importance and Duration, are to be preferred before mean and transitory Enjoyments; and to be secured at any Rate, though with Loss and Suffering here: The Apostle will inform you, *That the Sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the Glory, which shall be revealed in us.* (Rom. 8. 18.) and that *our light Affliction, which is but for a Moment, worketh for us a far more Exceeding and Eternal Weight of Glory,* 2 Cor. 4. 17. Our Saviour will assure you, That the straight way of the Cross, is the high-way to the Crown; and that not only what is given for Him, but also what is forsaken for Him, shall be rewarded and recompenced hereafter, and even in this present time an Hundred fold, *Mar. 10. 30.* full and overflowing Measure, *Luk. 6. 38.* and he hath furnished you with an Answer to all that can be said, though out of the Mouth of an Apostle, *Get thee behind me Satan; thou art an Offence unto me; for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men,* Mat. 16. 23. for, in such Case, it is not they that spake, but the Spirit of Satan and of the World, that spaketh in them, (*v. Mat. 10. 20.*) And that Blessed Spirit will enlighten your Mind to discern, and after it hath tryed your Fidelity, give you experimental Fore-tastes to Feel, and at last conduct you to the Possession and full Fruition of that transcendent Bliss, which *Eye hath not seen, nor Ear heard, neither have entred into the Heart of Man the things that God hath prepared for them that love him,* 1 Cor. 2. 9. the very Fore-tastes whereof do often render the Enjoyments of this World, not only mean and despicable, but tedious, nauseous, and a Burthen to experienced and holy Souls. Christianity is. indeed a Mystry, and a Riddle, to exclude unworthy Souls:

Souls: but it is a Rich Treasure, and a Precious Jewel, to such as will come up to the Price of it. True Christians, as to themselves, may laugh in their Sleeves at the Enjoyments of others: but Charity makes them pity and commiserate their Blindness and Errour. *Wherefore, save your selves from this untoward Generation, and come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing, and I will receive you; And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my Sons and Daughters, saith the Lord Almighty,* 2 Cor. 6. 17, 18.

This is what it pleased God to put into my Mind for your Service, and for his Service; and I wish it a happy Success for both. Be wise, look to your Call, and neglect not the Admonition.

ADVERTISEMENT.

THE PROPOSAL mentioned in this Letter, is, *For the Accommodation of some Devout Women, with such mean, but convenient Habitation, Work, Wages, and Relief, that they may have Time and Strength for the Worship of GOD, both in Publick and Private, and Freedom of Mind for Meditation, and Religious Exercises, while their Hands are Employ'd for Maintenance of the Body; and that while they enjoy the benefit of such Accommodations for their own Souls, their Benefactors, and the Church and Nation may be benefited by their constant Prayers.*

The Author hath Written also a short Discourse concerning the Antiquity, Divine Approbation, and high Esteem, which hath always been had in the Catholick Church, of a Religious Life Abstracted from the World; but it is not yet Printed.

He hath also begun to put his Proposal into Practice, having, for that purpose, procured a Friend to take a Lease of a convenient House of near 40 l. per Annum; his Design therein being to give an Experiment and Example of the great Use and Benefit thereof, and not merely the Accommodation of one Twenty Women. This he hath begun in hope and confidence that there is yet so much real Piety and Charity left in this City, and especially in this Sex, as not to suffer such a Proposal to come to nothing for want of Supplies, and become a Publick Testimony of the Barrenness and Insincerity of the Religion professed amongst us, as another Good Work begun by him for the Restitution of the most Solemn Christian Worship to its Integrity and just Frequency, of a Daily Celebration, in proper Places, hath been for some time. And he wisheth that People may be awakened by these Warnings, and extricate themselves out of the Enchantments of the World, lest they provoke some sweeping Judgement to clear the Land of such degenerate and fruitless Plants, as well as the grosser Weeds.

Printed for the Religious Society of Single Women.